

VZCZCXR09499

PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSQ #0091/01 0360650

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 050650Z FEB 08

FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6992

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0184

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000091

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO MK GR

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PUSHING FOR PROGRESS ON NAME ISSUE
BEFORE NATO SUMMIT

REF: A. SKOPJE 87

1B. SKOPJE 64 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) We are continuing efforts to persuade Macedonia of the need to maximize chances for a NATO membership invitation by embracing the Nimetz framework and proposing a differentiated name for use in international organizations (ref A). Our GoM interlocutors are sticking to their long-standing dual-name proposal and are preparing for an expected Greek veto. They expect to be able to weather the negative fallout in Macedonia and in the region. They also harbor hope for an 11th-hour change in Athens's position that would allow an invitation to go forward. We are trying to persuade them that putting an offer on the table offers the best hope, though certainly not a guarantee, of avoiding a veto. The Ambassador's meetings on Feb. 6 with the two main decision-makers here, Prime Minister Gruevski and President Crvenkovski, should provide a clearer indication as to whether Macedonia can be persuaded to take that step. End summary.

REINFORCING THE NEED FOR PROGRESS ON THE NAME DISPUTE

12. (c) DCM and P/E Chief met with the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, Martin Protoger, and Foreign Policy Adviser, Andrej Lepavcov, February 4 to reinforce the Ambassador's message to Deputy PM Stavreski the previous week (ref A) regarding the need to show progress on the name dispute with Athens prior to the NATO summit this April. The DCM reiterated the Ambassador's point regarding the need to maximize Macedonia's chances of receiving a membership invitation by proposing a differentiated name for use in international organizations, while maintaining their constitutional name and using that bilaterally with all willing countries, as in the framework proposed by UN Special Negotiator Nimetz in November 2007 (ref B).

13. (C) The DCM noted that the GOM could sell to the public such a proposal by pointing out that it would amount to ridding Macedonia of the despised provisional name "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," in exchange for a more dignified name that would be much closer to the constitutional name. That position would require a consensus among all major governing and opposition parties that the compromise was worth the benefits

the country would reap from NATO membership, including securing their identity as a full member of the Euro-Atlantic community.

GOM PLANNING FOR "DAY AFTER" SCENARIO, EXPECTING VETO

¶4. (C) Protopger said the name dispute was a "17-year problem that would affect future generations." He said the government saw no reason why the issue had to be resolved "in this generation." At any rate, the GOM already was analyzing the possible post-veto scenario and how Macedonia would react to that outcome. Skopje had recognized that Athens's position had "hardened" and expected that it would veto Macedonia's NATO membership based on lack of an agreement, on Greece's terms, on the name issue. The government understood the consequences of a veto, Protopger said, but "some decisions could not be taken under pressure."

¶5. (C) A veto would cause "unpleasant consequences" for both Macedonia and the region, Protopger continued. In that event, he expected "greater political uncertainty" in Macedonia and a rise in the influence of "radical structures," including separatist elements in the ethnic Albanian community. He said the government would take "political decisions" and other measures after a Greek veto, but did not specify what shape those decisions would take. Any solution leading up to Bucharest would, he emphasized, have to "protect the identity of the Macedonian people."

THE END OF MACEDONIA'S EURO-ATLANTIC IDENTITY?

¶6. (C) The DCM pointed out that Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic identity would be undermined by a Greek veto and urged the GOM to consider "putting something on the table within the

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Nimetz framework" to give Athens a chance to be flexible on the question of a veto. He enumerated the benefits that Macedonia would gain from resolving the issue, including greater stability, greater confidence in Macedonia's future among its younger citizens and ethnic minorities, greater attractiveness to investors, as well as likely expanded business and travel opportunities with Greece, and urged his interlocutors to balance those against the likely negative fallout from a failure to gain a NATO invitation. The negative consequences included having to explain to the Macedonian public why Croatia and Albania had succeeded in advancing their Euro-Atlantic agenda, while Macedonia had not.

¶7. (C) Protopger said PM Gruevski understood the consequences of a Greek veto, but his position was "clear." Macedonia could not accept a compromise under pressure, or one that undercut Macedonia's identity. No other political leader in Macedonia could do otherwise, he said, adding that Macedonia "always had been the one to make concessions to its neighbors" throughout its history.

AN 11TH-HOUR SWITCH IN ATHENS?

¶8. (C) Lepavcov asked whether it was likely the Greeks would change their position at the last minute and allow an invitation to proceed, but under the condition that Skopje agree to resolve the issue before ratification. The DCM replied that a serious Macedonian proposal in the Nimetz framework might help move things in that direction in Athens, and would at any rate give us more compelling arguments to use with other NATO Allies regarding the need to include Macedonia in NATO enlargement.

¶9. (C) DCM held a similar exchange with MFA State Counselor Vasko Grkov on February 1. Grkov said that Macedonia's strategy was to count on Greece to allow the invitation to proceed, which would then offer greater scope for reaching a settlement prior to parliamentary ratification. He absorbed the argument that Macedonia should take action (i.e., propose a name for international use) to maximize these prospects, and he made sure to brief Foreign Minister Milososki prior

to his current trip to Washington.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Macedonian officials, and PM Chief of Staff Protopger in particular, feel compelled to defend the party line in these discussions. We believe they are processing the idea that this problem will not solve itself and that the Nimetz framework offers a reasonable way to protect and advance Macedonia's interests. However, it is clear that the true decision-maker is the Prime Minister, with the President having the power to act as a spoiler should he choose to do so. The Ambassador's separate meetings with those two leaders on Feb. 6 should provide a much clearer indication as to whether Macedonia can be persuaded to make a serious new offer to Greece in the Nimetz negotiations.

MILOVANOVIC